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An Address
To the People of South Carolina

by

Governor Richard W. Riley

November 22, 1983
7:30 p.m.
The Governor's Mansion

Good Evening

Tonight I want to talk with you about a decision we must make -- one which will have a lasting impact on our future, our children and their education.

South Carolina always has been a proud state, proud of the contribution we have made to the founding and growth of our country, proud of the great minds we have produced. It is a heritage of leadership and influence that reaches far beyond our boundaries. It is reflected in our state seal that proclaims the goal "Prepared in mind and resources." This heritage of pride and leadership, handed down by our ancestors, has made a single demand upon us: to be the best. Tonight, I will speak to you about, what I am calling, a "New Approach to Quality Education," and it's designed to do just that.

All our lives, we have read studies and heard the experts talk about South Carolina's deficiencies in just about every educational category. The statistics show that we have not devoted the resources needed to adequately prepare the minds of our children. And while we've made what we thought was a strong financial commitment to our schools during the last decade, we have not kept up with other Southern states.

But statistics and studies only reflect part of the problem. There is a far greater tragedy in lost human potential. This tragedy results in a multitude of social problems: overcrowded prisons, infant deaths, high unemployment, and a dependence on welfare -- problems that hinder our ability to grow and prosper as a state. If we are to be competitive for new jobs and economic growth, we must be willing to reclaim the strength of our heritage and become leaders once again. I believe education is the key that will unlock the tremendous potential that rests within the minds and hearts of our people.

Our fellow South Carolinian Benjamin Mayes has said, "The great tragedy in life is not failing to reach your goals. The tragedy," he says, "is having no goals to reach." And that's what I want to talk with you about this evening. Tonight, we are opening the door to what I hope will be a better day for South Carolina. We are laying the first stone in the foundation of what will be a New Approach to our state's future. And let me be clear, what we need is a New Approach to Quality Education.

That's why in January, I will be presenting to the General Assembly this comprehensive program to improve public education in our state. It's a program designed to produce results -- one that will demand accountability from our public school system

-- its students, teachers, administrators and, yes, from our state's elected officials also.

This New Approach aims high. It establishes new, tough standards of educational excellence, and provides incentives to reach and exceed those standards. It puts our whole educational process to the test.

For the past year, we have debated and discussed the problems facing our public schools. I have traveled the state, visited schools, and have seen first hand what is being accomplished in the classroom. During this time, I also received your suggestions to improve the quality of our schools. Your ideas have been studied by two hard working committees made up of the best minds in our state. Your suggestions form the heart of the New Approach to Quality Education I will outline tonight.

This is not a piecemeal nor a stop gap measure. And it's not "politics as usual."

Rather, it is truly a New Approach -- a far reaching package of educational reforms -- probably the most comprehensive ever to be proposed to improve our schools. It contains specific programs to deal with specific problems, and it does demand

positive results. This program is designed to achieve not just educational respectability, but educational excellence.

Let's briefly review the program.

To raise student performance, this program would require that students take more courses than they now take in order to graduate. It mandates that all high school students pass an exit examination in order to be awarded a diploma. It requires that all high schools offer programs that will prepare students for college. And it also contains programs for our gifted and talented students, both at the elementary and secondary levels. And for students who seek vocational training, we will provide courses directly related to skills needed to get a job. These proposals and others will raise student performance and will produce a graduate better able to compete in tomorrow's job market.

Well over a half million children attend South Carolina public schools -- and that's 92 percent of our school age children. Over a third of these students cannot meet minimum basic skill standards. Students without basic skills have to struggle to read the want ads, fill out an application, and get a decent job. Under this program, we would correct these deficiencies with an intensive instructional program that will

get these children back on the right track to learning. Our goal is to see that every child who goes through South Carolina's public schools acquires, at a minimum, the fundamental skills that will enable him to get a good job, support his family, and contribute meaningfully to the future of this state.

But educational excellence does not begin and end with the student. Much of a child's educational experience rests with the teacher. This program recognizes a teacher's valuable influence on the student, and opens up new avenues to attract and retain the brightest and most qualified people available.

It's time we recognize teaching as an important profession, and provide the training, evaluation and incentives to ensure that we get and keep the best people. It demands tougher standards and better preparation. It will elevate teaching to a professional level that will attract new and gifted people into our classrooms, and encourage our brightest students to consider it as a career.

But if we are to gain the greatest value from our classrooms, we must treat our teachers as valuable people. We cannot expect quality unless we are willing to pay for quality. Therefore, I am proposing that we, first, raise teaching salaries to the Southeastern average. And second, that we implement an

incentive pay plan to reward master teachers for superior efforts.

Now I was raised with the belief, "You get what you pay for." The New Approach will not subsidize mediocrity, but will fairly reward excellence in our classrooms.

We often think a child's education starts the day he or she walks into the first grade. But a child's learning experience actually begins long before that day. We must provide the foundation that will help all of our children launch successful school careers. To do this, I am proposing attendance in a kindergarten, whether it's public, private or church-related, before entering the first grade. In addition, I propose half-day child development programs for 4-year-olds who need extra help. I am firmly convinced that we must provide this kind of fundamental investment if we are ever to escape the cycle of poverty that we have known for generations.

Many times this evening, I have spoken of the accountability that we have built into this program, the kind of accountability that will make this program work. While I have outlined our new demands on students and teachers, this program also requires accountability from the schools themselves, their principals and their administrators. Under this plan, schools and school

districts would be rewarded for progress they make in achieving higher standards. Incentive grants will be awarded to schools that show achievement in test scores, student and teacher attendance, parental involvement and other factors that promote better learning.

All of these incentives are designed to promote an essential partnership among students, parents, teachers, principals, and the community at large. We know that quality schools are not achieved in a vacuum. They are not achieved solely by government nor solely by school boards. They must be a cooperative effort in which concerned people throughout the community work harder and work together for better schools.

This, then, is the New Approach to Quality Education: tougher standards for students, tougher standards for teachers and administrators, a basic skills program that gets results, stronger early childhood education, incentives to attract and keep quality teachers, and a program to reward excellence in the schools and encourage community involvement.

This is truly a comprehensive New Approach. Some of the proposals will cost nothing. Some will cost little. And some will require an additional investment, but it's an investment we must make.

Therefore, I shall propose to the General Assembly that we adopt a one cent increase in the state sales tax with all of the revenue to be used only to finance this New Approach to Quality Education.

Tonight, as we visit together, I'd like you to think about the kind of future you that want for our children. What kind of state do you want them to grow up in. What kind of opportunities do they deserve. How can they best avoid the social traps of idleness, drugs and crime that often prey on the unprepared and the ill-informed.

Ask yourself if this issue is important enough for you to get involved -- for you to take a stand on behalf of our children. You see, the children of this state represent our future as a state. No one else will stand up for their futures unless we do. If we are going to succeed in this effort, we must stand together. And I'm asking that you make this stand with me, beginning tonight.

There is a link between my recommending this package and the General Assembly's final decision on it. And that link is you. You can make the difference. If you agree with me that our public schools can and must get better, please let your senators and your representatives know. If you agree that a

penny is a small investment to make in an unlimited future, I ask you to tell them. Because, I assure you, those who insist that we have come as far as we can, will be speaking up. They will oppose progress and oppose education's role in that progress. They will be making excuse after excuse for why we can or should do nothing -- for why we should not take the risk -- for why we should not be the best.

Now I accept none of those excuses. I am moved only by my sense of responsibility to this state's future.

You see, a penny is a small price to pay for the thoughts of a generation. A penny is a small price to pay to unleash the unlimited potential of our state. Yes, a penny is a small price to pay to unlock the minds of our children and to prepare them for the challenges of the future.

And a penny is a small price to pay for a program that will bring us results. A program that will ensure discipline. A program that's accountable. A program that works.

My friends, with your help, this New Approach to Quality Education will succeed. And I assure you that when it does:

Students and parents are going to do better.



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Teachers and principals are going to do better.

Yes, Education, itself, is going to get better.

And, most importantly, South Carolina is going to be better.

Thank you. God bless you. And a Happy Thanksgiving to you
and your family.